

## **The UN Food Systems Summit: Why we remain sceptical, and why we are getting involved**

### **Memo from the IPES-Food panel, 12 November 2020**

The 2021 UN Food Systems Summit started poorly. The Summit's origins were opaque, its relationship to existing food systems fora unclear, and its initial planning phases lacking in transparency, while questions were raised over its leadership. As a result, many civil society groups have chosen to keep their distance from the Summit. In March, IPES-Food expressed its own concerns about the Summit, and called for urgent rethinking and reopening of the process.

While many of these concerns remain, there have been significant attempts to put the Summit on a course towards meaningful outcomes. Fruitful discussions around how to build 'nature-positive' food systems are already underway, and are bringing the potential of regenerative, agroecological approaches to light (see Discussion Starter for 'Action Track 3'). Here and across the Summit process, there is a real opportunity for robust confrontation of the different visions for the future of food systems. There is a chance to spotlight agroecology – and its transformative potential – for those struggling to find holistic solutions to meet the SDGs.

That is why IPES-Food is entering into these discussions, via the appointment of Olivier De Schutter (IPES-Food co-chair, UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights) as co-lead on 'sustainable management'\*, under Track 3. This involvement will allow IPES-Food to deliver critical inputs on sustainable and resilient food systems.

As highlighted above, many shortcomings remain, and IPES-Food will continue to challenge them from inside and outside the process. In particular, the panel will continue to push for: solutions that are systemic, i.e. able to deliver environmental resilience, secure livelihoods, social equity and food and nutrition security; solutions that are designed with peasant and smaller farming organizations, social movements and others on the frontlines of food systems; and solutions that strengthen inclusive governance of food systems and redistribute power. As we argued in March, the Summit must be meaningfully refocused around the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS). The validity of the Summit process, and our continued involvement in it, is contingent on these questions being addressed over the coming months.

Through Olivier De Schutter/IPES-Food's involvement in this strand of the pre-Summit work, we do not purport to represent anyone other than ourselves. We are aware of and sympathetic to the many reasons why others have chosen to remain outside the process, and will continue to work with them to ensure that the Food Systems Summit is subject to the scrutiny it requires. We will keep partners updated as this process evolves.

*\*Olivier De Schutter has been named as co-lead on the 'Sustainable Management' pillar of Action Track 3: Boosting Nature-Positive Production at Sufficient Scales. Track 3 led by: Action Track Chair: Joao Campari, WWF International; Vice Chair: Tosi Mpanu-Mpanu; Youth Vice Chair: Lavetanalagi Seru; UN Anchor Organization: UNCCD.*

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